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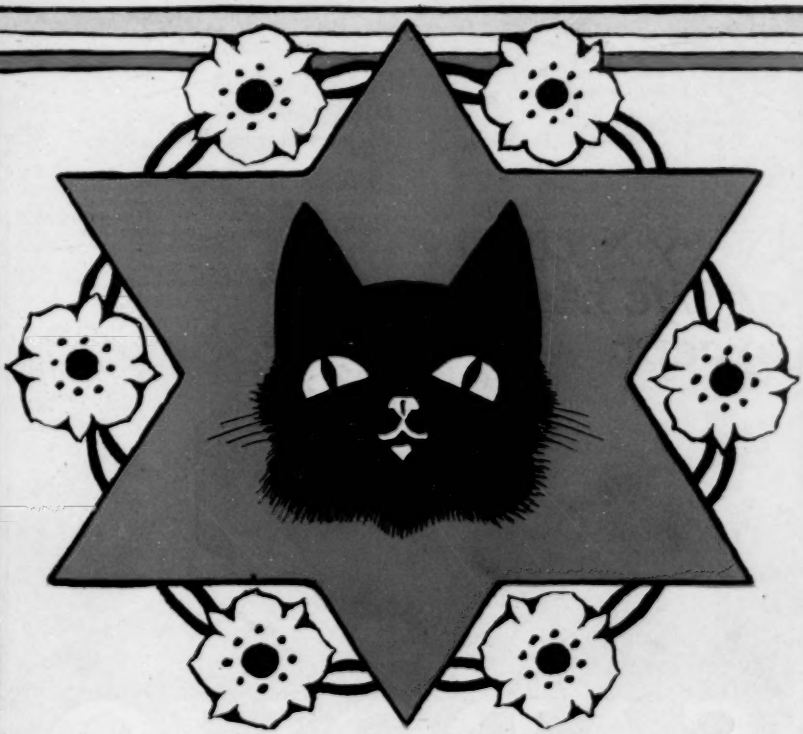
The Black Cat



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Ten Cents

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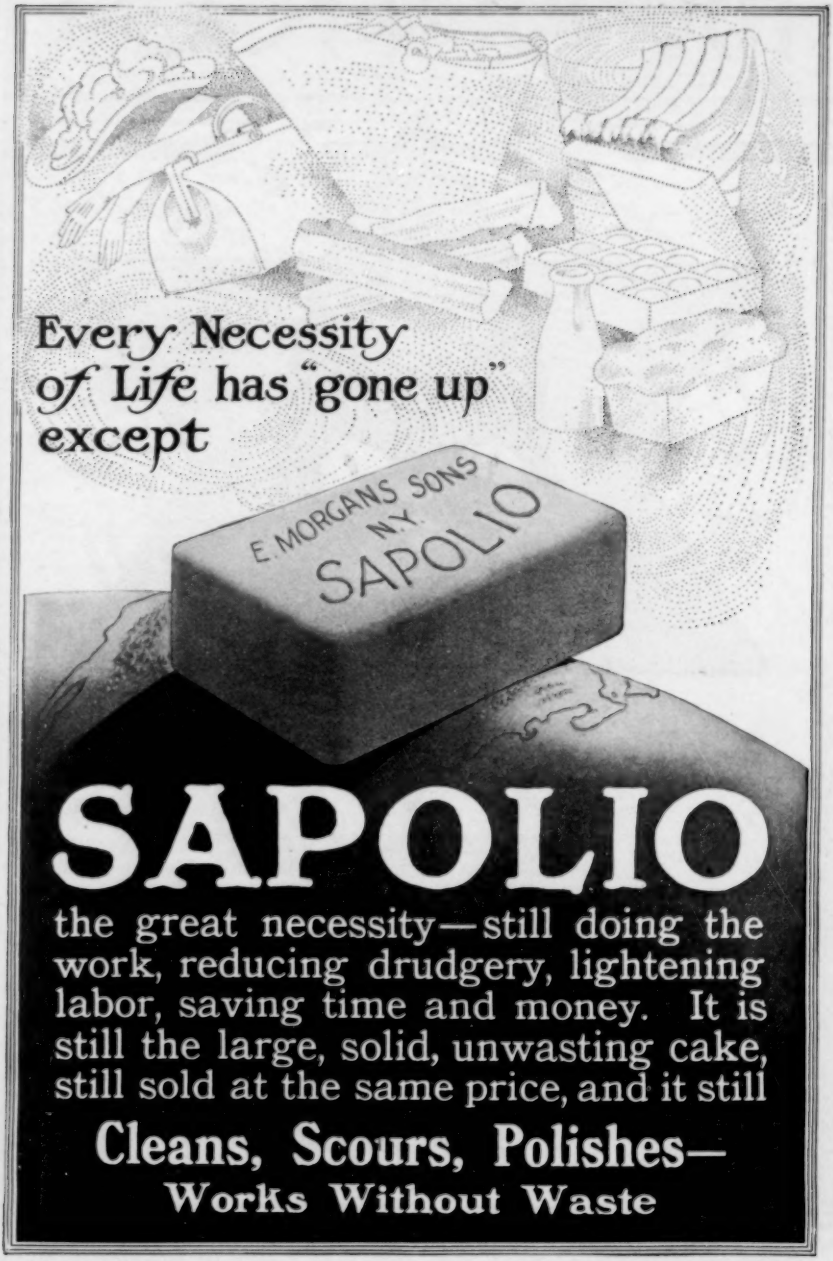

SAPOLIO

the great necessity—still doing the work, reducing drudgery, lightening labor, saving time and money. It is still the large, solid, unwasting cake, still sold at the same price, and it still

Cleans, Scours, Polishes—

Works Without Waste

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The Black Cat

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The Wedding Present.*

BY MARION HILL.

THOUGH it was only 'bout noon yet the heat on the desert outside must have been fully a hundred degrees (and since we were only a day's ride from Death Valley the scenery was none too gay, let me tell you) whereas inside the shack it was quite ten degrees more. The smell of its new wood — what with the heat frying the turpentine out of it — 'most made me dizzy ; but Chass didn't seem to feel any discomposure except a sense of prominence, it being his wedding day, and he got into his clothes as straight-headed as if he was swimming into them. Mighty fine and fiesta he looked, too, in his new pongee silk shirt and buckskin trousers, fringed. Gold wasn't yellower than he was; no, nor worth more, either. Chass wasn't just the exact name of him, that being Charles McPherson; but since he always signed himself Chas., why, there you are.

"Here," I hailed, heaving his shoes toward him after having bacon-rinded them up to the bright level of the rest of him. "And a sheer waste of good griddle grease," I pointed out as he jammed right into them. "For those delicate little number elevens of yours will be alkali white long 'fore you reach Seven-up Siding, let alone Hicks City."

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But, since it was his wedding day, he hadn't his ordinary ear for sense and just maundered out the same question he'd already asked me forty times previous:

"Say, Sunrise, after I've started you'll fix the house pretty as posies, won't you? And then harness the burro to the cart — for Elsie'll have her trunk, you know — and meet us at Seven-up Si——"

Here I groaned with much melancholy and he stopped. We'd been over it so many times I knew it backward and inside out. He was to catch the up train to Hicks City, meet his bride from Boston (her train being on time, that is) marry her there, then catch the down train back to Seven-up Siding where joyousness in the shape of me and the burro was to greet them and give them welcome home. Home. I thought of the broiling desert, to say nothing of Spread-head Willie, and blinked. Not so Chass. His eyes were wide open and brighter than stars. Pretty nice chap, Chass.

"Well, I'm off," he said, coming over and grasping my hand. It made me feel solemner than Grandmother's funeral. "Wish me luck, Sunrise. No, wish Elsie Garden luck, God bless her."

"Sure," I said. "Sure." It was all I could think of, but I made it hearty.

He swung out into the sunlight and tracked towards the Siding. Then I thought of something,— sudden and hard.

"Chass! Oh, Chass!" I yelled.

He turned around. "Well?"

"If Spread-head Willie shows his face inside the door hadn't I better kill him?" I shouted.

"Kill him?"

"Kill him!"

"And why kill him?" asked Chass, astonished for the moment. Then it came to him, too. "Well, p'raps so," he admitted. "Kill him." And he veered 'round and walked on, quick, as if to get away from the idea.

"It's not 'p'raps so', you handsome yellow idiot, it's sure so," I mumbled to myself, knowing women more or less. For Spread-head Willie was a domesticated puff-adder, fierce on looks, but the tamest snake ever. Chass had spent lots of time raising him a pet, and he felt lots bad at sentencing him to death. But when a

man marries he has to give up many a comfort,— Spread-head Willies among them. A snake twisting around the bed legs isn't calculated to tickle a bride,— not from Boston anyhow.

Shucks, but Chass made a gap whenever he left. He was always moving around so, doing fool things in a sociable way and interesting you half to death, that you missed him worse than a brass band when he turned a corner. After herding with a man on the Arizona ranges through all seasons, dry, wet, and electoral, you come to learn him; and all I could grub up against Chass was that he was too sanguine. Such natures get on your nerves in the long run. You can always tell a growler to hush up, but you have to let the cheerful chant along. Chass was so hopelessly hopeful that all he had to do was to sow a row of pea seed in order to chew spring lamb with mint sauce. And when he planted a rose-slip he smelled bouquets.

This came strong to me when I poured the water Chass had shaved with on to the tomato cans in the window. Each can held a twig that looked as green and succulent as a wire hairpin. They'd been dead so long and thorough that no man could tell t'other from which. Except Chass. And, lord, he'd name through 'em like they was a rosary. "This is heliotrope, and this is carnation, and this is lemon-verbena, and this is humpty-gump or what not" till you didn't know if it was he was crazy or you. You knew somebody was. Maybe Elsie'd find out.

While I muck-raked through that shack, titivating right and left, I couldn't keep my mind off Elsie to save me, wondering what she'd look like and how long she'd last, and how she'd cotton to me and oh, lots of things. Not that it would blanch my hair if she didn't cotton, for I lived a comfortable fourteen miles away and didn't have to lope into view unless I hankered to. She was none of my bride of course, but still I was fair wild to see her. I'd grown fond of her. I had for a fact. There was one stretch of four weeks when Chass had been bunged up with poison-oak in his eyes and I had to do the Cyrano-de-Bergy-rackett reading her letters to him and answering 'em back; and I couldn't help but get fond of such a straight, clean, warm little soul as hers showed out to be. Not much I couldn't. Most love guff is mush, molasses and moonshine, but Elsie Garden's was poetry and promise and

dignity, like a field of young wheat in the sun. In words and ways she was plainly ten cuts and a half above Chass. And yet I couldn't say she was too good for him. No, sir. No good woman is too good for a good man, for when a man's good he's damn good. And that was Chass.

As I feste-lente-d around that shack with a broom, a duster, and one eye out for Willie, I reminisced about how Chass had met this Elsie Garden and quite envied him the fun of it. For he'd hired himself out to a Wild West Show a year or so back, and had played a big circussy theater in New York for a whole winter. The boys, all brave and huge and young and don't-give-a-d, like Chass, took tremendous with the money-bugs, so the wild west management fitted them out with evening suits and turned 'em loose on society. The things they had to eat! It was great to hear them tell of it. But I'd better stick to Elsie. She was a little tired-out school teacher from Boston and was visiting a cousin to get her nerve restored. Well, Chass restored it. They never met more'n six times all told, but they wrote by the mailsack and things came to a head. You see, Chass had known only women who were sly if soft, and loud if good; and she'd known only men who were soft if good, and bad if loud; so when he met a woman soft and honest, and she a man who was loud and good, it was all dickie with the pair of them. Moreover, Chass was tired of wind-spaces and wanted a hearthstone (which was the shack, — built it himself, too) and she was tired of one room and yearned for a fifty-vara (which was the desert) so each thought that the risk was safe to take, and took it.

But marriage ! Every time I think of it, I take hold of my back teeth to see if the jar's done a hurt. Not but what I like women and honor them and all that, same as Chass, but I don't fancy them loose around the premises like him. I'd sooner have them tethered in my memories or in my prayers or even in my last will and testament, some safe place where they couldn't kick up till I got good and ready for them.

Getting " good and ready " made me think I was pretty nearly through with my garnishing. The shack looked neat as a shingle. I gazed finishingly around and saw nothing out of place but Elsie Garden's jeweled little pistol. Not knowing where to put it though,

I just let it lie. Beauty is no name for it. Chass had had it made for her,— the originalest wedding gift a bride ever got,— small enough for a baby, solid silver wherever silver would go, and with her name written out full on it in diamonds — E, L, S, I, E. It was pretty enough to eat. It made me think of Spread-head Willie again, too, so I went outside, dropped on all fours, peeked under the house and made a noise like a can of evaporated milk. Sure enough he hiked up and looked at me. But he suspicioned the invitation, and instead of curling on out, he flattened his neck worse than the victim of a steam-roller accident, put his tongue out at me firm and final, then lowered sluggishly and took his time about retiring. I didn't dare shoot, for the grass was dryer than tinder. I'd a felt kind of sheepish about burning the house down, saying to Chass and Elsie "Welcome home" and handing it to 'em in an urn.

"Settle with Elsie yourself," I told the place where Willie's tail had been last, then got up and fried me some lunch. Killing time famishes me. But the hour for the burro crawled around sooner or later and before I knew it I was at Seven-up Siding and the train was slowing down. Nothing but Chass's good-natured pull with the train crew would have got that trunk out, small as it was, for the Siding's just two planks on the cinders and trains won't stop long enough to throw off peanut shells.

And whizz ! it went now like a good dream, and there was the trunk on the Siding, and there was Chass, and there was the burro, and there was me, and there was Elsie. And I never felt sorrier for anything on God's earth. But I don't know why. Except that she was so small and lonesome; and with a look in her big bright eyes which if it wasn't fear I'll eat my sombrero, — the look a wild rabbit has when it's caught alive. It doesn't shiver and it doesn't fight. Its eyes shine, though, and it keeps still; my, but it keeps still! What surprised me full as much as her look of fear was his look of happiness. He rayed like a star-fish. Joy and content rippled over him in billows. I never saw him handsomer. I was up against something so funny that I guess my tongue hung out.

And Elsie beat her pistol for good looks. She was pretty as her letters, and I can't say louder than that. Yet the sweetness of her

struck you first and most. She made you think of the kind of girl your baby sister that died would have grown up into. The way she wore her clothes was a caution. They expressed her like a flower. If that's hifalutin it's sure true. Take her skirt,—that outside thing. It didn't sag in front, nor laligag at the sides, or go draggle-tail at the back, but it swung true all the way around just as if she had put on a morning-glory. The feet of her made your eyes pop, so all right they were, so slight and shiny in their speckless black boots. Her things *belonged*. If you found her belt on the Tropic of Capricorn, you'd know it in a minute, you'd say "That's Elsie Garden's," and you'd kiss it.

When she took my hand in hers and said "I've hoped to know you for a long while and am glad to do so at last," I heard a voice that I hadn't heard since I was a boy of sixteen and dreamed it, awake, by a brookside, in June.

What she said next was casual — more to herself.

"And you have your costume on, too," she murmured hesitatingly, her trouble-shining eyes traveling from me to Chass. He was still so busy bailing out his surplus joy that he didn't take notice. But I did. Costume? I shot a survey at Chass and then I squinted down at me. Costume? Chass wasn't in costume, not by a long sight. Chass was in his things. So was I. Chass's costume was the spike-tail evening suit the Wild Westers lent him to gambol, round in, nights, and took back at the end of the season. Suppose she didn't know it? I whistled.

Chass thought it was to the burro and he yanked hold of the trunk. I helped him with it into the cart. Elsie meanwhile looked at the scenery,— *for* it, rather. All she got was horizon to the east, west, north and south, and in the middle a white sizzling glare of desert, leveler than a pie-board. Off towards one end was Chass's new house, sticking up small and painful, like a sore thumb.

"Where is Seven-up Siding?" she asked him, with gentle quickness. And she standing on it, then and there.

"Why, your feet aren't big as all that," he joshed her, much as to say there was a plank or so sticking out.

"I thought it was a place," she said, making a swift movement of her hands, almost as if wringing them. But she dropped them

back to her side, and the rabbit-shine deepened in her eyes.

"It *is* a place," sang Chass.

"Aren't there any people, Charlie?" she urged. And the plaintive appeal of that word "Charlie" crept up and down my veins like the ghost of a friend I'd thought a heap of.

"Check the invoice," said Chass. "You, one; Sunrise, two; me, three. All here." He tore off a rip of laughter. Of course, a grouch wouldn't have been the bridal thing, still the jolly he put up made me want to boot him.

"All here," she said, with a faint smile for his laugh. I drew the deepest breath yet; they'd all been on thin surface so far. She was game, then.

"And now for home," caroled Chass, one big hiccup of glee, motioning to his bride to climb to the cart seat.

I've never asked Queen Wilhelmina of Holland to wrap up the Princess and come for an airing with me on a garbage van, but I know just how she'd look if I did,— from Elsie Garden. (I can't ever think of her as Elsie anything but Garden. Elsie Mac don't seem the same person.) And it did *seem* sort of sacrilegious — asking that flower-like little lady to clamber into a cart. I felt as mean as if I'd been caught rinsing fish in holy water, especially when she looked startled at me as if begging me to intimate that Chass had gone temporarily mad and was just sort of frothing at the mouth about the cart. But she was game again. Except for a distressed pink flush in her cheeks, which came and went, came and went for a few minutes after, she stepped from my offered hand to the board seat of the burro cart as naturally as if stepping into a velvet-lined taxicab. But the terrible stillness of her! It scared me. And I'm hard to scare. If she looked little standing up, she dwindled 'most to nothing sitting between Chass and me. If we'd been two giant hunters who'd shot and brought down a half-feathered cherubim we couldn't have looked bigger nor wickeder. The shy little surveys she took of Chass from time to time ought to have flayed the hide off of him — but didn't — seemed like she was dissecting him alive, trying to find out where the New York Chass was hiding to, this man being so different. P'raps it's no wonder she kept silent. She spoke once though. We'd jostled along 'bout two miles (getting dipped in perspiration first, then

dusted over with alkali, and then fried a rich golden brown in the sun) when she suddenly leaned forward and pointed to a hummock by the trail. A top of it was a conglomeration of sage-brush stalks twisted into a stumpy stubborn cross.

"What's that?" asked Elsie Garden.

And he told her. Now, I wouldn't have. Truth's a good thing, but it's got such a quick spring action that you can't trust it,—something like a trap set for a skunk. The skunk *may* get caught, and then again the Angel of the Lord stubbing his toe against it *may* lose a foot. "What's that?" asked Elsie Garden.

"It's a grave," said Chass, proud as if it was Niagara Falls. "Some time back there was a man out here and his wife, prospecting. And, kind of a sudden she — well, she — oh, she — why, she wanted a doctor, quick. So they set out, but — but — er, er, it happened right here. And she died."

Elsie Garden's face was quiet and white, with her big frightened eyes burning in it. She kept them steadily upon Chass's embarrassed ones.

"Did her baby die, too?" she asked, straight from the shoulder.

Chass colored up as if she'd been indecent. "Yes," he stuttered. "It did."

"I'm glad of that," said Elsie earnestly, "very glad of that."

Here I walloped the burro. I had to do something. Walloping a burro doesn't make it go any faster in front, only makes it go wider at the sides; consequently the dust I accomplished was plumb marvelous. No wonder Elsie shut her eyes. That's how she come to catch sight of home-sweet-home all of a crash.

As Chass lifted her from the seat he kissed her. And how do you suppose that little thing took it? Like a slap. To be kissed in broad daylight, without any roof over her and before a third person, turned her face white as a lily. To kiss a girl pink shows she likes it, but to kiss her white — well I dunno. It takes a person who sets back to see these things; Chass never. He pointed to the shack.

"Sweetheart, here's your house," he said, and his hat came off, invocational. You see it was a kind of altar to him. "Our house."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, surprised out of all caution. (And that place sure *did* look like a bald-headed tool-shed with a lean-to.)

" Every — bit of it — myself," assured Chass, taking her dissent to be polite anguish of disbelief in his ability. Me, I'd have been proud too. For lumber's rarer than gold, out our way, by a big sight. Wrap a piece of scantling up in white tissue paper tied with red ribbon and it's a Christmas present to turn a man's head. There aren't trees, there aren't saw mills, and there's next to no transportation. The bull-dog pluck that it took to build that shack can't be sized except to a person who knows. And you wouldn't believe the bill if you saw it. To have to pay that bill would make a mummy talk to little Egypt in his sleep. Chass was right to be proud.

Yet I could see her side too. She'd had friends who'd " built a house " and the picture in her mind was of a four-story stone front, with a lawn outside, with elevators and electricity inside, and an airship in the garage in the back yard. Push-buttons for ice-water on all four floors. Like as not, palm garden on the roof. And an orchestra in the cellar. Poor Elsie. And poor Chass. Right at that moment if Mary Madonna wasn't weeping for both of them I miss my guess.

" You asked me to build you a home," Chass went on, fatuous. " And I built it." He and the fellow who left Rome marble spoke like twins.

Elsie, who had taken off her gloves, seeing her journey was done (gloves in *that* heat showed what a prim little lady she was) now stepped forward and put her hand on her husband's arm — I can see it to my dying day, that little hand, tiny and sweet and helpless, white against his yellow shirt as an orange blossom.

" You are a good man," she said strangely. " And I thank you."

" Why don't *you* thank *me*," he choked, upset, and no wonder, by the flute quiver in her voice. Then, recovering, " Just come in and *see* it ! "

When we reached the front step, Elsie shuddered back from it.

" Oh, look ! " she gasped.

" Willie," thought I. But it wasn't. It was a spot of a spider no fatter than a healthy currant. The front step was a soap box which the spider was admiring.

" Take it off," whispered Elsie, and true as a blue moon she was half fainting.

As I raised my hoof to obey, I got the orange blossom on *my* arm.

"But don't kill it," she prohibited.

To her, the whole thing was ghastly and serious, but me, as I booted that scrap of an insect safely from step to sand, I felt sheepish enough to baa. But I couldn't laugh at the little lady; she was sure sick and shaking, and all on account of a spider you wouldn't see till he'd coughed at you. I found myself figuring on what she'd do some fine day when she lifted down the frying-pan and found a tarantula in it. When a tarantula's feelings are hurt it stands up on its stilts like one of Grandma's doughnuts. A tarantula would bring Elsie to a state of "Alice, where art thou?" quicker than a wink. And it was a state Chass didn't have much patience with.

Right now, though, he hadn't time to see she wasn't pleased as he was, for he'd taken her inside the cook-oven (that being what the shack felt and smelt like) and was showing her 'most every nail. The place was just one room, but Chass had partitions in his mind and consequently all but touched them with his shoulder as he moved around.

"Here's the end of the bedroom," he explained, toeing a plank a few inches from where the sheet hung down from the bed, "and this is the parlor-part," kicking delightedly towards the side-wall where there was a rug laid down with a chair on it, "and here's the cool breezy dining-room," elevating his toe rapturously in the direction of the deal table under the open window.

The little lady followed his explanations as composedly as a corpse and in the dead silence she kept you could a'most hear her mind-castle smashing into flinders.

"And where is the 'garden,'" she quoted, evidently from his letters. She spoke as if in a trance.

"Here," joyed Chass, hurrying over to the sand-blast in the tin cans. "This is heliotrope, and this is —" straight through to *Ave Maria.*

Elsie wasn't particularly a-spring chicken, she was a full grown little woman when she'd stepped down to Seven-up Siding, but by George she looked no more than a child to me now, a regular small orphan that her guardian had punished, and for something

she didn't do, either. She turned away from the "garden" to Chass, as if she was very tired and wanted to rest against him; then, remembering she'd only seen him six times, she came to the conclusion she couldn't possibly.

"Charlie," she said. She never talked any louder at any time than a bird that sings in its dreams of a moonlight night, but right now it was quieter than even growing grass. "Charlie, show me the 'white roses over the porch.'" She didn't say "For God's sake," yet those very words quivered on the air, somehow.

"Well, I should say!" agreed Chass, happily. So we all three piled into the lean-to. Chass knocked open the back door. He had to duck his head to escape the "porch" which was two shingles and a half. He gazed hard at a hole in the ground. Then he lost his temper and shook his fist at a gopher track.

"I'll fix you," he promised. "I'll get my gun and fix you!"

But the word "gun" cured him and brought the smile back to his face, reminding him of his wedding present. He darted into the other room and brought it back with him.

"Sweetheart," he faltered, reverential. "Here's the first present I ever bought you and I hope you'll like it."

She put out her hand graciously for the shining thing 'fore she'd quite sensed its nature, and when it lay cold in her palm her blood froze to ice with fear of it. Some women are that way. Loaded or not, makes no difference.

She wouldn't hurt his feelings by dropping it, but the last ray of life and hope died out of her face as she held it — same as a scorpion — and listened to him telling her how to use it.

"But is not it very dangerous?" she shook out. "What would I want to use it for, Charlie?"

"Oh, for many a thing, sweetheart. Horse thieves for one and rattlesnakes for another."

"Rattlesnakes?" her white lips made the shape of the word rather than the sound of it.

"Oh, they're thick as blackberries round; all you have to do is to look out for them, though. They're the fairest snake there is. But, sweetheart, look here at the kitchen." He waved around the empty lean-to and she dodged at sight of the gasoline stove as if from a bomb with a burning fuse.

"The kitchen," she echoed gravely, just saying the word after him but not believing it a mite. You see, "kitchen" to her meant a palatial place of white tile, hung around with pearl-colored enameled ware, and holding an electric cooker, to say nothing of a chef to engineer it. She could no more have fried a flapjack on a gasoline stove than teach Spread-head Willie to say "Good morning, when do you think it will rain?" Not that she was a fool or a shirk, but she was just a frail little bunch of brains without a muscle in her body. Put her behind an ink bottle and she'd earn her a living, or win her a husband, but turn her out to grass and she'd starve.

"The kitchen," nodded Chass. "And now, sweetheart, you've seen the whole of your kingdom. All you'll have to do from this on is to rest and play the queen."

I got a vision of Elsie resting. After she'd hung out the wash, she could rest maybe by kneading her bread-dough, and while that was raising she could toy a spell with the flat-iron.

The little queen in her kingdom kind of made me want to go away home. So I did the beginning moves. It was coming on evening anyhow. And with us it comes on in such a lonely hurry that it 'most brings a cold wind with it.

Elsie's soft rabbit-eyes burned right in to mine. "Oh, tell your wife to come and see me, soon!" she prayed.

Wife! If my optics had been on movable stalks like crabs I couldn't have stuck 'em further out than I did towards Chass in search of information. I wanted to be sure 'fore I spoke. If Chass had given me a wife, I was bound to support her. But he'd played me square.

"He hasn't any wife," roared Chass. "*He* hasn't sense enough to get married!"

"Then I'm alone, alone!" said Elsie.

"With *me*," added Chass, flinging out his arms towards her.

"With *you*," agreed Elsie, her frightened child's eyes measuring the strangeness of him.

She made a step back, then another, then another, then another, till at last she stepped into the main room. Then she closed the door, very softly, and left me and Chass eyeing each other — quite a long spell.

"Queer, ain't they?" he asked at last, sociable but flurried.

Then we heard the shot. After it there was silence, no scream, no laugh, no fall, no move, just silence.

I think we both knew. For we couldn't budge for full sixty seconds. And if I looked all the bad I felt why I was a sight for angels. As for Chass, I don't ever want to remember the awfulness of his face, and not wanting ever to remember, it's something I never forget. Then we ran in. But what could we do?

Dead? She was deader than three Sunday's on a string. We didn't even have to touch her to know that. She had lain down a-top of the bed and then had pulled the trigger. I reckon she hadn't made a twitch, so smooth she was, but, oh, so scared and lonely in the little face of her. Don't laugh — but it was the boots that brought the sob to my throat; they were so small — and tired — and there was dust on them. She'd come across the continent sweet as a pin, and two hours of Seven-up Siding had done all the rest. She'd taken off her hat for to make a surer job of it, and the braids of hair around her head marked a halo on the pillow. The silver pistol sparkled out from under a strand of it, and the diamond E, L, S, I, E, twinkled so pleased-like and contented with itself it made me sick.

When I dared to look at Chass, he had dared too to look at me and he sprang at my throat like a panther.

"Tell me God's truth," he raved. "Tell me it was an accident."

"God's truth," I said, solemnly. "It was an accident."

For I didn't have time to flip two-bits for it — I had just to risk it on the go, — that a man's kindest lie may be God's truth, some time.

The Story That Was Not for Publication.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

ALLEN'S morning mail comprised two letters. One bore the Johannesburg, South Africa, postmark; the other was a rather too familiar long envelope, containing a story returned from The Red Blood Magazine. Allen gave preference to the Johannesburg letter. A glance at the subscription revealed that it came from Ethel Hoyt, a girl friend. The body of the letter disclosed that she had joined her brother, who had been brought from America by way of Australia to superintend the building of mining machinery in South Africa. To this she added some interesting information about Johannesburg, and concluded with certain sentiments which do not properly belong to the public.

Allen liked the Johannesburg letter very much more than The Red Blood Magazine missive which he then took in hand. Accompanying his returned story was a personal note from the editor, who, in expressing his regret at being compelled to reject Mr. Allen's story, wished to point out that what he wanted was the strong-arm adventurer, up to his neck in daring exploits, and with the howl of the wild ringing in every sentence. The last expression gripped Allen's literary sense — Howl of the wild ringing in every sentence. Beautiful!

His eyes fell on the letter from Johannesburg, then wandered back to The Red Blood Magazine epistle. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully for several minutes, smiled, and nodded.

"It — wouldn't — quite — work out with Jack Hoyt," he murmured, "but — I guess I could depend on Ethel. Yes, I can depend on her. By the Lord Harry! I'll try it."

Now the Razorblade Building was one of the sights of the city. It shot up a narrow wedge of steel and brick in the air twenty-five stories, but because in sea borne gales of wind there was oscillation

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enough in the three upper tiers to stop a clock, floor 22, occupied by The Red Blood Magazine, was as high as people cared to conduct business in that building. Therefore the manager was a bit surprised when Allen strolled in with the object of renting the three upper stories.

"I'll tell you," explained Allen. "The fact is I'm troubled with a peculiar nervous disorder. I have been to two doctors about it. One says I must live at a considerable elevation, the other holds to it that what I need is sea ozone. Both are agreed I should have quiet. Now about the only place I can find to combine the three is the top of your building. Elevation, sea ozone, and quiet, I should judge, are right up there most of the time. I know, of course, the floors are not rented on account of the oscillation, but I rather like the motion of an ocean steamer, and guess nothing worse is to be anticipated from your building."

The manager looked Allen over, appeared satisfied regarding his desirability as a tenant, and tapped the pad on his desk reflectively.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll make you a proposition. I'll let you have those three upper floors rent free for six months, if you will agree to reside in them, and at the end sign a statement declaring you have not suffered a scare or inconvenience during that period from the oscillation. That should enable me to get other tenants subsequently."

"All right," nodded Allen. "That will suit me, provided I am not to be bothered by any one. I don't want even the elevator run up there, for I must have absolute quiet on account of my nervous trouble."

"Certainly," agreed the manager. "I'll give orders that no one disturbs you."

Thus Allen became the lone tenant of floors 23, 24, 25, of the Razorblade Building, as before remarked floor 22 being occupied by The Red Blood Magazine. He moved in late one evening, bringing with him quite a library of African travel. One room sufficed for his personal habitation, but it is to be noted that he decorated the walls with a map of Africa, African warlike trophies, and skins of beasts reputed to have come from Africa. In this African atmosphere Allen completely obscured himself, his

only relaxation being a trip to the city zoo on Sunday. There he might have been seen lost in profound study of the lions, rhinos, and hippopotami.

In a week or two, had there been any one to listen, the click of his typewriter might have been heard night after night, but as the office of The Red Blood Magazine below closed at five o'clock, Allen's nocturnal proceedings remained a secret. Had the post office authorities, also, cared to observe, they might have noticed quite a correspondence going on between Floors 23, 24, 25, Razorblade Building, and Johannesburg, South Africa. In about six weeks' time they might have further discovered that Johannesburg, South Africa, began sending bulky long envelopes to the office of The Red Blood Magazine, Floor 22, Razorblade Building. Shortly after this, Allen literally dropped down to see the editor. He found him beaming all over, as editors are apt to do when they foresee a booming circulation.

"Hello, Allen!" he cried. "Where have you been all this time?—What! Over in Jersey digging up historical romance. Don't bring that stuff in here. Not on your life. In Heaven's name why don't you go somewhere and get on to the real thing. What's the use wasting your time on skeeter fiction. See here! See here! Just cast your eye over this."

The editor caught up a MS. and thrust it into Allen's hand.

"Ever heard of Bert Lamar?" he questioned.

"I seem to recollect the name somewhere," replied Allen guardedly.

"You have! Well, I shouldn't wonder. He's a Westerner. Got the real snap and ginger in his work, a birderino of a writer. He's dug right down into the core of darkest Africa. Sends on his stuff from — from Johannesburg, that's the place. Five cents a word, and we can't fire back the checks quick enough. You look at that — 'On the Trail of The Digdig Man' — and see how he starts right into the meat of his story."

Allen began to read from the MS.: — "Nevada Bill's rifle clicked and missed fire. On came the rhino, with little eyes gleaming savagely, and the earth trembling beneath the thunder of his huge bulk. Down went the rhino's monster head, and up went Nevada Bill twenty feet into the air. From the tuft of a palm

tree, Chemoyo, the African chief, watched in terror the rhino swing around and wait for Nevada Bill's descent."

"Bully!" ejaculated Allen.

"Sure," chuckled the editor. "Tossed twenty feet into the air by the rhino. By Golly! that's the stuff. Any reader would want to know what Nevada Bill did when he struck the earth, or the rhino's horn, whichever it is."

"There's pretty good African color in it, too," remarked Allen approvingly, letting his glance run over the next few paragraphs.

"And why not?" responded the editor. "Comes straight from the spot. It's a pity you can't hunt up something of that kind, but it takes money and pluck to get there. You can tell at a glance Lamar has tackled a rhino, may be he's been tossed by one. We've accepted six stories, and written for the first call on all his work."

"Well," said Allen, rising, "I'm sorry I can't come anywhere near him, but as you say, a man must take a lot of chances to write about rhinos in Africa. I should like to meet that fellow, Lamar, if he ever turns up here."

"You shall," said the editor. "He is sure to do so some day."

Allen went back to his secluded life in the African atmosphere of the upper story of the Razorblade Building, and with a great flourish The Red Blood Magazine brought out Lamar's African jungle stories, vibrant with the savage warfare between man and beast in the gloomy depths of the dark continent.

Allen obtained each number as it came out, and seemed hugely entertained with the thrilling narratives. Meantime he continued to send bulky long envelopes to Miss Ethel Hoyt, Johannesburg, South Africa; and bulky long envelopes came from Bert Lamar, Johannesburg, South Africa, to The Red Blood Magazine.

Finally by the South African mail came a letter to Allen warning him not to send any more long envelopes, as Ethel Hoyt and her brother were coming home. Ethel, the writer, expressed the hope that she had played her part in Allen's plan satisfactorily. She added that she had advised a certain party that Lamar was also making the trip home, called suddenly to the bedside of a sick uncle. Thus was exemplified the mighty hunter's tenderness of heart.

A few days later Allen received a letter from the editor of The

Red Blood Magazine, redirected from an address in Jersey, saying he expected Lamar shortly, and for Allen to drop in at the office. On the day that the next South African mail was due, Allen accordingly dropped down to The Red Blood Magazine office. In his hand he carried a neatly folded MS. On a slip of paper he wrote, Bert Lamar, Africa, and sent it in to the editor. The editor did not wait for Mr. Lamar to be shown in, but rushed out with both hands extended.

"Why, my dear——"

Then he stopped suddenly on beholding no one but Allen.

"Well," smiled Allen pleasantly.

"Well," ejaculated the editor, looking vaguely around for some one. "I—er—thought—"

"Quite right," responded Allen, "that you expected to see Lamar. Well, here he is, straight from South Africa. Floors 23, 24, 25, of the Razorblade Building."

"I don't understand," said the editor.

"No," replied Allen innocently, as he handed the editor the MS. "But this will make it plain. I was going to take it down to a newspaper—the story, you know, of Africa on the top of the Razorblade Building. But if it's worth $1,000—that's about the rate you've been paying Lamar—why, you can have it. I thought I ought to give you the first chance, on account of the boom you have worked up on Lamar."

The editor looked at Allen quite a long time, then he broke into a faint laugh.

"Do you mean to say you did that stuff right over my head?"

"Sure," nodded Allen.

"But the stories certainly did come from South Africa."

"Through the medium of the future Mrs. Allen. I am going down to meet her on the boat."

"Well, I guess you had better not take that story down to a newspaper," decided the editor. "You see, we shall have to keep up the boom on Lamar. By the way, I should rather like to meet him i.e.—her, I mean."

"Come right along then," spontaneously invited Allen.

The Sandalwood Box.*

BY NELLIE EASLEY.

AS Mrs. Well's companion, my chief duty was to keep a small sandalwood box with a huge red seal, out of her sight. That may sound simple enough, but in reality it was an arduous duty. No matter where I hid the box, Mrs. Wells was sure to find it, not intentionally, of course, for it was the last thing she ever wanted to see.

Once I suggested that she burn the box. I realized that it would probably mean the loss of my position, if my suggestion should be carried out, for then my duty would be ended. But even as I spoke a look of abject fear had crossed her face.

"No, no," she said hastily, "I cannot burn it. It must be always in my possession, although I wish I could keep it out of my sight. I will never break the seal, for if I should find that a certain letter in it had been opened, I would count myself a murderer!" She had spoken calmly enough, but she could not hide the look of fear in her eyes.

In spite of my efforts, the sandalwood box kept reappearing, and each time Mrs. Wells seemed possessed of that terrible fear. She did not reproach me for my seeming negligence. I am sure she understood that I tried.

Barring the short periods following the appearances of the box, Mrs. Wells was very gay. She was extremely popular and her friends were legion. She never spoke of her husband. In all the time I had been with her, the only person I had heard mention him was the tall, gray Dr. Bradley, who also lived at the hotel. One night as we passed him on our way to dinner, I heard him say in an undertone to a guest, "I knew her husband."

He always spoke to her in his quiet, dignified way, and watched her closely, but I never saw them talking together. Sometimes I

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imagined that he did not approve of her. I often wondered just how well he knew her, and whether or not they had ever been friends.

One afternoon Mrs. Wells was looking for a package which had been put away on the top shelf of the wardrobe, when suddenly the sandalwood box rolled out and fell to the floor. The seal broke and the contents were scattered about. Mrs. Wells screamed and covered her eyes, while I hastily gathered up the letters. But quick as I was, I had time to see that every letter had been opened. A sickening feeling of horror passed over me as I remembered what she had told me. As I raised up I noticed that the hall door was ajar and I was quite sure that some one standing in the hall had been watching me. However, I did not stop to think of it then, I was so anxious to get the box sealed.

I carried it to my room and without again looking at the letters sealed it securely, and put it away. I was in no hurry to go back to Mrs. Wells, I dreaded to face her. Although I was sure that she would not question me, I realized that she must surely feel that I knew. When I finally did return, she had gone, and a note on the table informed me that she would not be back until ten or eleven o'clock, perhaps later.

I tried to read, but the letters danced before my eyes, and her words kept ringing in my ears, "if I should find that a certain letter in it had been opened, I would count myself a murderer!" and then I would think of the handful of letters, each of which had been opened.

The mystery of the whole affair made me heartsick. I could not fathom it, but felt as helpless as a blind person groping about in a strange room. In vain I tried to reason it out, no solution came to me. I sat there until my brain whirled and my head ached. I had an overwhelming desire to scream and scream, until some one would come to me, anything to rid myself of that horrible growing fear.

Finally, unable to calm myself, I went downstairs to one of the small sitting-rooms which had not been lighted, and seated myself by a window. I had been there but a little while when I heard some one on the veranda talking. At first I did not intend to listen, but after a few minutes I was listening breathlessly, afraid

to move lest they should discover my presence. It was Dr. Bradley, and he was talking of Mrs. Wells!

"Brent," he was saying, "did you notice the lady who left in Lessing's automobile this afternoon, the one in the yellow gown?"

I was not sure of the answer, but I judged from what followed that it was an affirmative.

"That woman did a very heartless thing once, and from what I hear, I suspect it has been causing her a good bit of discomfort ever since."

The two men drew their chairs closer together, each lighted a cigar and settled back as if ready for a long story.

"Brent, do you remember Captain Malcolm Wells?"

"Yes."

"That was his widow!"

"No!" Mr. Brent's answer was almost a gasp.

"You are surprised, and so are many others, knowing that Wells has been dead but a few months."

Mr. Brent did not answer, and for a few seconds there was absolute silence. Then Dr. Bradley went on.

"Yes, that was Wells' widow, the former Miss Lee Duffy. He worshiped her, and in his blind devotion failed to see that she did not care for him. You know he was a brilliant man, and undoubtedly she saw many promotions before him, the possibility of which appealed to her. But love? No, she was not reckoning with love, her cool calculations did not include that. However, no one can say that she did not act her part well.

"You remember they were married a year ago last December, and went to Fort M—— after the honeymoon. The social triumphs of Mrs. Captain Wells always found their way into the papers. No one ever guessed that there was so much ingenuity and keen diplomacy behind those fascinating eyes. Every molly young lieutenant was in love with her, and strange to say, the women liked her, too, and you know the two don't often happen.

"Then Wells was ordered to the Islands. He and his men were to go immediately, but no transportation was afforded the ladies just then, so she returned here,

"Of course she went about a great deal, and no doubt the social prestige her position afforded her gave her much elation. Anyway, in the course of two months Malcolm sent for her, but it took a month for the letter to reach her, having been sent from the interior.

"When the letter came, all the selfishness in her selfish heart was uppermost, I imagine, for she wrote him that she didn't think she could come just then, perhaps she would never come, since she was not sure that she had ever cared for him, and certainly not enough to bury herself in that little Island Post. And man, she sent that letter!

"The incident seemed to pass from her mind, for she was just as gay as ever, undoubtedly she did not realize then, how heartless it was.

"About six weeks later she was present at a dinner party, when her brother was announced unexpectedly, and asked her to come into the next room for a moment.

"She excused herself, laughingly.

"The next thing the guests heard was a low cry, and the words, 'Malcolm is dead!'

"Yes, he had been dead two weeks, and she had not received the word. It had been cabled the press, and her brother had seen it in the papers, but still doubtful had cabled, only to have the news confirmed.

"Malcolm had taken the fever, and after a hard siege, seemed to rally, then the relapse came, and then — the end."

Dr. Bradley stopped a moment before going on.

"You see, old man, it is an easy thing for a man to die, if he wishes to, when he is already so near death."

Mr. Brent's answer was a mere whisper.

"Well, do you know, that woman is afraid to read the letters which were returned, for fear she will find that the last one he read was the one in which she told him she did not care for him. I have heard that her companion's sole duty is to keep that box of letters out of her sight. To-day I passed her sitting-room and the door was ajar. Mrs. Wells was standing in the middle of the room with her hands over her eyes, while the girl was picking up a handful of letters. The sandalwood box in which

they were kept had been accidentally broken open, I suspect."

At last I began to understand!

"Do you think —" Mr. Brent began.

Dr. Bradley laughed harshly.

"It isn't a thinking matter with me, Brent, I happen to know, and I might drop a word that would quiet all Mrs. Wells' fears, but I won't!"

I almost stopped breathing in my anxiety to hear his reason.

"No, I won't, she doesn't deserve to know!

"Last week I met Hunter, he was one of Wells' lieutenants, home on a furlough, and he told me his part of the story, of the letter and all.

"It seems that the post doctor was a Southerner, whose family was with him, a wife and daughter. The daughter was one of those typical southern girls, affectionate and impulsive, and she loved Malcolm —No, I'm not saying there was anything between them, I doubt if Malcolm ever suspected it, I doubt if any one ever knew it but Hunter and herself.

"When Malcolm was taken ill, Hunter was with him as much as his duties would permit, and the girl was always there. She could not bear the thought of leaving him to the nurses, so she stayed, caring for him, reading to him in her soft, sweet, southern drawl, and when he was strong enough, talking with him of the home across the water.

"It was a wonder Malcolm didn't see, and she, womanlike, hugged the secret to her heart, afraid to look at him, sometimes, lest her eyes betray her.

"The day the end came, he was much better, and she had been reading to him, laughing and chatting gaily, cheering him with the thought that he would soon be commanding the men again.

"Hunter brought the mail, and handed it to her. In the package was that letter, and both unsuspecting, asked Wells if he could hear a letter from home. She had read all his letters to him, and Hunter said he lay there watching her as she opened it, saying over and over 'from Lee, from Lee.'

"The girl glanced over the letter, her face whitening, then she leaned over Wells and asked: —

"'Do you think you are strong enough to hear something very, very — good?'

"'Yes, yes, from Lee!'

"Then she read: —

"'Malcolm Dear: —

"'I have your letter, and Dear, I am coming, coming as soon as ever I can. It has been so long, and I have waited and wanted you so, and just as soon as I can, I'll be with you, Dearest ——'

"Her voice broke in a sob.

"With one gasp Wells fell back.

"They rushed to him, but it was too late, he spoke only two words.

"'Lee! Darling!' Then he was gone.

"The joy of it had been too much, the eager waiting and watching was over, but the end was one of happiness for him.

"Then the girl handed the letter to Hunter.

"He read it in a dumbfounded way, not understanding the hard, cruel, unwomanly words staring him in the face.

"When he looked at the girl she was standing by the body, her hand on the face.

"'Mr. Hunter,' she began, 'I could not read that to him, it would have killed him. Father said a shock might be fatal, but I thought the joy would not hurt, because he was expecting such word any day, and then afterwards, when he was well, we could tell him ——'

"Then she flung out her arms in an agonized appeal.

"'Mr. Hunter, I loved him, I loved him!'

"Hunter said as long as he lives he will see her there, in the beauty of her glorious womanhood, her hands outflung over the dead man's body, her whole heart revealed in those words, 'I loved him!'

"The woman who wrote that letter is not human, and to think he loved her!

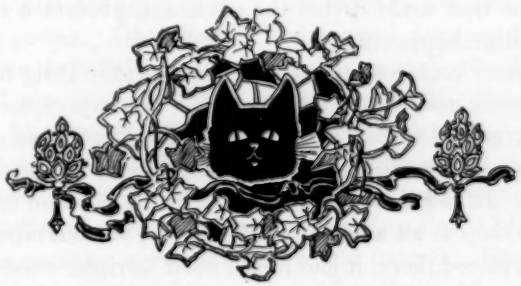
"They agreed between them that they would never let Mrs. Wells know, and if she ever looked in the package of letters she would think the Captain had opened it and read it. Hunter, himself, sealed the sandalwood box and labeled it. To-day was the first time the seal had ever been broken."

Dr. Bradley knocked the ashes from his cigar, and both men rose to their feet.

"Of course you agree with me, Brent. I am in no position to betray Hunter's secret, and moreover I wouldn't if I could. If ever that woman looks at those letters, she will find that last one opened, and she can think she murdered him! It would be a just punishment for her."

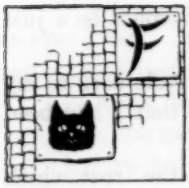
I waited till they were out of hearing, before I stole back to my room. The next morning I informed Mrs. Wells that I had been called home, and left on the noon train.

I could not stay with her. I could not betray the trust which had been placed in Dr. Bradley, and had I been free to do so, I would not have told her. She did not deserve to know!



The Live Stock of Fong Tay.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.



FONG TAY sat in the little green-grocery and puzzled over the mystery which encompassed him. Fong was nervous and unstrung. His small eyes blinked behind the large horn spectacles as he peered through the window at the sidewalk beyond. His lean brown hands twisted nervously round each other as if their owner considered the movement helpful to the wondering mind that wrestled with the mystery. But Fong's brain was not equal to the task.

To the mind of the Chinaman it was no ordinary mystery. The happening that distressed him bordered on the supernatural, and as he sat dry-lipped and wide-eyed, his thoughts flew to the fat joss that sat in the smoke-flavored atmosphere of the little rear room. It was certainly a matter for the joss. No ordinary explanation would fit the bill, and to Fong's mind the little fat god was the only one that could divine the cause and prevent a recurrence of the peculiar happening.

The mystery centered on a bag of potatoes that Fong had placed on the sidewalk near the door of his shop. His experience of potato bags was large and varied, but this particular bag was an exception. Its actions were erratic and very distressing to the nerves of the Chinaman. It had been placed in a reclining position against the wall of the shop at an angle of sixty degrees, yet ten minutes after it had been placed there, it had raised itself upright, stood for a few seconds in a perpendicular position and then fell forward, spilling the potatoes into the gutter!

The Chinaman was astounded. There was no one within a ten-yard radius of the bag; its contents were new potatoes which Fong had sorted with his own hands; there was no visible agency by which the movement could be effected, and yet he had seen the bag deliberately raise itself and fling the spuds into the gutter. Fong

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stood staring stupidly at the nearly empty bag till his sense of thrift recalled him from the realms of conjecture. The little shop was situated upon a slight rise, and the potatoes that fell in the gutter were scampering wildly down the hillside, so the Chinaman started in pursuit.

Two boys who had been sitting on the opposite side of the street helped in the chase. They gathered up the runaway vegetables and carried them back to the shop, and Fong rewarded them with a present of six bananas. The bag was put back in its old position, but this time the Chinaman leaned it at a still greater angle from the perpendicular, so that a possibility of a repetition of the occurrence was made more remote. To Fong Tay's mind the happening was a remarkable one. If the bag had fallen sideways in the first instance it would not have startled him, but his astonishment arose from the fact that it had first attained a perpendicular position before falling outward. With his gaze fixed upon the erratic bag he backed into the shop and then watched it through the window.

But the potato bag had evidently cultivated a liking for the strange stunt. The Chinaman had not been in the shop more than five minutes when he was horrified to see it again rise slowly to a perpendicular position, pause a few seconds, and then fall heavily into the gutter. Once again the liberated potatoes bounced joyfully down the hillside as the terrified Fong rushed to the door. The Celestial was now convinced. It was perfectly clear to his mind that the bag was moved by supernatural agency.

The two boys who had retired to a doorstep on the other side of the street to eat the bananas they had earned by the first upset, again proffered their services to the stupefied Chinaman, and again the potatoes were rounded up and bagged. Fong paid them with more bananas and they returned to their old position, while the bag was once more fixed by its amazed owner.

It was at this juncture that Fong's thoughts flew to the joss. The fat god who sat contentedly behind the little stick of burning incense, was the proper person to grapple with the mystery. The Chinaman was aware of his own limitations, but he knew that the power of the joss was unfathomable. With semi-paralyzed limbs he pulled himself into the inner room and made a fervent plea for protection to the fat deity. The god was smiling peacefully, and

Fong's nerves relaxed somewhat under the influence of the smile. Surely the joss would protect him. Fong had been a faithful devotee, and it was right that the incense-sniffing deity extend help to the terror-stricken worshipper. After praying he shuffled back into the shop and looked out fearfully through the window.

The sight that met his eyes made him grasp hastily at the counter for support. For the third time the bag uplifted itself without visible aid, balanced itself a second and then spurted its contents into the gutter. But that was not all. Fong's gurgle of horror was strangled by the subsequent happening. A basket containing tomatoes, that stood beside the potato bag, moved swiftly towards the edge of the sidewalk and imitated the action of the bag by tipping its contents into the street.

Fong Tay collapsed. He sat in the doorway and wept bitterly while the two boys chased the runaway vegetables down the hill. Light was beginning to dawn upon the Chinaman's mind, but the coming of knowledge did not lessen the tremendous fear that gripped him. He knew now that it was the spirit of his mother's cousin that was causing the trouble!

The cousin had been dead some months, but before he died he had cursed Fong in a most strenuous manner, and the Celestial was sure that the erratic actions of his vegetables were the result of spirit vengeance. He was certain of it. The cousin had found it impossible to square matters during his lifetime, but had evidently taken the first opportunity that offered after passing into the unknown. A cold perspiration broke out on Fong when he thought to what length the vengeance of the dead man would go. Judged by the volume of the curses it would indeed be terrible.

He determined to take the potatoes and tomatoes inside the shop and then make another appeal to the joss. It was the duty of the joss to protect him. He had burned incense before the deity for a score of years, and now when he called upon him for protection the fat image did not respond.

Fong shrieked invocations to the god. He promised to double the daily supply of incense. He promised offerings of various kinds, but the joss gave no intimation that he would take the matter in hand. He smiled with calm indifference upon his fear-stricken worshipper, till, finally, Fong became annoyed. With

distended eyes he turned upon the image and abused it. He called it epithets that he had never dared to call it. He cast insinuations upon its power to control the spirit of the dead cousin, and finally he threatened it. He picked up the chopper that lay upon the meat block and threatened to smash the joss to atoms if the annoying spirit was not immediately chased outside a thousand-mile radius of the establishment. Fong's action amounted to unqualified blasphemy, but fear had driven him mad. After making the threat he returned to the shop and peered out.

All was quiet with the array of baskets and crates upon the sidewalk, and for a moment Fong thought that the threat had put the joss upon his mettle. Then a startling occurrence took place. A barrel containing apples slid quickly along the pavement and fell into the gutter. A small basket of turnips followed it hastily, and a well-filled bag made a sudden somersault and covered the sidewalk with a layer of green peas.

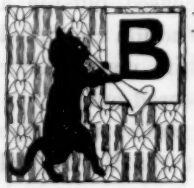
The Chinaman gave a wild yell of rage. Rushing to the door he slammed and locked it so that the spirit of his tormentor could not enter the shop, then swinging the meat chopper he dashed into the inner room to take his revenge upon the joss that had turned a deaf ear to his prayers.

The two boys seeing the disturbance amongst the vegetables again crossed the street in expectation of more bananas, but when they saw Fong shut the door they stopped and looked guiltily at each other. From inside the shop came wild yells and sounds of breaking crockery, and their fear increased. Hastily removing three fish-hooks from the barrel, basket and bag, they fled round the corner, winding as they ran the fish lines with which, while sitting on the other side of the street, they had caused the peculiar movements amongst Fong Tay's stock.

Next day the landlord of the little green grocery found that his tenant had fled, and he wondered much over the battered remnants of the joss that he found in the inner room. Fong had fled before the wrath of the dead cousin, but the two boys with the fish-hooks and line were regretting his departure.

The Great Diamond.*

BY THOMAS L. MASSON.



EING a multi-millionaire may be a pleasant business, if you don't push it too hard. Sometimes I have thought that Hortense and me have been pushing it too hard. But then, it's human nature to take all you can get — even in emotions and feelings, and envyings and such like. We're just like other folks, after all. Our money ain't changed us in that respect.

It might have been worse, anyway. I met Hortense when we was both poor. And we've stuck to each other. When I rose, Hortense, she rose with me. Of course, being a woman, she has had ambitions and projects that haven't interested me much. But then — that's natural — in a woman. And it's been kind of a pleasure in catering to her. It's kinder nice being stuck on one woman — and then giving her what she wants. Being richer'n mud, I could do it in the case of Hortense.

Of course I'm not that kind myself. Me for a simple life. Luxury palls on me. Hortense got a fool notion at one time that she wanted me to wear pajamas. And to please her I rigged myself up in a foolish suit of 'em. Not for me — again! Hortense laughed almost into hysterics to see me struttin' around in 'em. Why, when I was stakin' claims, going to bed with my boots on was the regular etiquette. I'm ready to make some concessions to style and comfort — but not as far as those la da da pajamas.

But that's a closed incident. And a lot more like it — such, for instance, as having a valet. I tried 'em for six months, but before God, I couldn't get used to 'em! I wear the best clothes — plenty of 'em — but I like to put 'em on myself.

That's one thing I admire about Hortense. She likes frills — she wants me to like 'em. But when she finds I don't take to 'em,

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she don't go off and sulk. But then, if she was that kind she'd be living on alimony now, instead of me sitting up nights to make her happy.

That's the difference between Hortense and the rest of the bunch of women who strike a bonanza — like me. Most of 'em begin to feel their oats, get ambitious, get crazy to butt in to the swell set and scheme to do it. They can't rest day and night trying to make their husbands over to fit their new lights. Well, Hortense has wanted it bad enough, but she's always been on the level. She thinks of me first and the others after. That's the difference. The others don't count.

Hortense being the right sort, of course I've done more for her than I would have done otherwise — even before she was cured of her ambition. We've been everywhere — paddlin' down the Nile, doin' Rome, Florence an' Paris an' London and the whole bunch of spots on the map.

I bought Hortense a private car for home use, and then — we motored in France — that's the word. I got a couple of frog eaters fresh from the factory to tinker the car. One of 'em held the map in his hand, lookin' for bumps, while the other one scooted the blamed thing ahead a mile a minute. And me and Hortense sittin' back as large as life, holdin' hands and swelled up with ourselves.

Yes — we've done it all — there's not a blamed thing worth seeing that's left. Hortense knows it all — Michaelo Angelo, Rubens, Turner, Shakespeare, Jerusalem the Golden, Chinese crockery, — the whole shooting match.

As for me I was glad when we got back once more in our bungalow in New York State. It's long on varnish and swell chromos, but it's the nearest thing to Home I know. There's so much of it that's outdoors. And one evening while I was sitting reading the mining news and Hortense was chasing her feet through one of them piano attachment tunes, I saw something that made me interrupt.

"Eh, there, girl," I says, "here's the largest diamond in the world just been found."

"You don't say," says Hortense, wheeling around. "Where abouts?"

"In Africa, of course," I says. "Bigger than the best ever. Weighs over a pound — perfect too — they've taken it to England."

Hortense's eyes snapped.

"If you're any kind of a man," she said, "you'll buy it for me."

Do you know, I hadn't thought about that. I just read the item because it was interesting. But when I saw Hortense all excited, I knew she meant business.

"Wouldn't it be grand," she cried, "to have it! I'd be the most talked of person in the world. Will you get it for me?" she says, coming over and fastening her arms about me.

"You couldn't wear it," I said, beginning to hedge. "Why, Horty, the blamed thing weighs over a pound. Weren't you listening?"

"That ain't much," said Hortense. "It ain't been cut, has it? No — well, that'll reduce it some. My, oh, my!"

I saw that nothing would do but Hortense must have that diamond. And so the next day we started for London.

Hortense, she tossed night after night thinking of that stone. And I must say the idea sort of pleased me too. To have the biggest diamond in the world! Well, well, that meant something! It was a great ad for Hortense. Some of those society queens we'd run up against in the course of our travels had snubbed her. But I guess with that diamond on there'd be no more of that. They'd all be nice to her anyway, if only to get a peep at it.

I got kind of excited about it myself. I couldn't wait to get there. It was sure worth a couple of million to feel that way for a week. New feelings are hard to buy at any price when you are black with money and have squeezed the globe fairly dry.

We got there at last. I looked up the agent. At first he would show me only a glass fac-simile, but when he found out who I was he produced the genuine stone. We dickered for a couple of days, and finally I got it for two and a half millions.

It didn't look like much either. It might have been any kind of a paper weight. But Hortense and I were delighted. Of course the papers got hold of it, and we couldn't go anywhere without being followed by a mob.

Then came the polishing process. We had Amsterdam cutters

working on it for a month, all of 'em confined in a room where they couldn't get out — and me and Hortense watching 'em like cats watch mice.

You ought to have seen that stone when it was done! As big as my fist, and I have no birdlike claw either. It glimmered and gleamed. It was a wonder, for fair!

Hortense tried it on, all over her, to see where it would rest easiest! She couldn't put it on any lace dress, because it wouldn't hold, and as for bands, they all slipped. Finally she got a gold chain and strung it around her neck.

And then we started back home.

The duty on that shiner was $800,000, but I paid it without a quiver. We'd got what we wanted, and it was worth it. When you get what you want in this world, never mind the price. If you've got it, it's worth it every time.

We had a place on Riverside Drive, and we went there and camped out with that stone. First it was put on exhibit in a jeweller's window — just to start the ball rolling.

We had a real nice box at the opera, and I never shall forget the first night Hortense and I went. Talk about a lighthouse by the sea! Hortense was Sandy Hook and Eddystone all rolled into one.

Some one of her favorite authors — I forget his name, but she told me, remarked that Hortense was the observed of all observers.

And that's what she was. Pretty soon we began to get invites to everything. All the women — high and low — wanted to get a peep at that stone.

The papers began to refer to Hortense as the sandwich woman. That was hard, wasn't it? But then, as Hortense remarked, "Such is fame."

After we'd been at it for about a month we came home one morning about three from a swell function, both of us pretty well tuckered out. The fact is, my stomach had gone back on me. I was a physical wreck — well, about like the rest of the smart setters. My! but I'd given a good deal for a couple o' weeks vacation at hard work in a mining camp.

Well, Hortense looked at me, and I looked at her — both sort of jaded like.

She took that paper weight off her bosom and rolled it over on to the pincushion.

"Jim," she says to me, "I guess I've had about enough of it."

"Nonsense!" says I. "You're tired and sleepy. Things will look brighter to-morrow," says I, glancing slyly at the stone.

"Never again for me!" said Hortense. "I'm ready to quit, Jim. Honest now, I'm getting round shouldered carrying that thing about. Besides, they've all seen it. They're all tired of me now. It hasn't brought me a single real friend. Now they'll drop us. I hate it!"

And with this Hortense blubbered right out.

Well, to tell the truth, I was beginning to feel the same way. When you get rings under your eyes, and a table all set with gold and glass makes you only feel seasick, and you begin to count up your friends on the fingers of one hand, then it's time to take to the woods.

"Don't worry, Hortense," says I, plunging into my four poster. "We've been up against it before together. We still have each other. And to-morrow morning, it's back to the bungalow."

And then it seemed as if I hadn't gotten well asleep before I suddenly opened my eyes. Some one was in the room, groping about.

It only shows what luxury and fine living will do for a man's nerve. Why, in the old days I'd 'a' been up and at him in no time. As it was I lay there and blinked, until he turned his attention to me.

He was a burglar all right, and an expert, too. He covered us with his revolver, while Hortense grabbed my arm. Then he backed over to the bureau, and picked up the diamond.

"Is this the shiner I heered so much about?" he says.

To tell the truth, I didn't care much whether he took it or not.

"The same," says I.

He looked it over critically. Then he gave it a toss over on the sofa, where it stuck in the back crease.

"Didn't you come for that?" says Hortense.

The burglar shook his head, while his hands swept into a bag all the other things in sight.

"I should say nit," he said. "Wat good wud a ting like dat do

me? I couldn't trun it in, could I? Why, if I was caught wid it I'd be jugged. And no one wud buy it off me. Now you folks don't move, see?"

With this he disappeared.

I was for chasing him, but Hortense held me back. We notified the police, and that afternoon the papers were full of the news that the burglar took $30,000 or $40,000 of other stuff, but didn't take the famous stone.

Well, we didn't worry about a thing like that.

But a couple of days afterwards, in the bungalow, Hortense says, "Jim, I guess we've had all we want out of that stone. Let's get rid of it."

Which made me smile.

"Horty," I says, "I wanted to surprise you, but I see it's no use. That's what I've been trying to do."

She looked at me in despair — real, genuine despair.

"I hate it," she said. "Can't you, Jim?"

I shook my head.

"No," I said. "I'm afraid it's going to be hard work. No one wants it. Even that burglar wouldn't have it. I've been cabling all over, offering it at any old price. But I tell you, Horty, that diamond is about the most useless thing in the world."

"Can't you get some king to take it off your hands," said Hortense.

"Kings," I said, "ain't what they used to be. Most of 'em are going around Europe with fringe on their pants. And the ones that have got money — well, they don't have to be advertised. Of course there's always suckers like you and me who might buy a stone like that, but it's hard to find 'em."

Hortense pouted.

"I can understand that," she said, "of course. But I just feel somehow as if I must get rid of that old stone."

"Leave it to me," says I. "I can fix the matter, I think, if you let me be away for a while."

Hortense was too much done up with her recent society efforts to travel, so she stayed home in the bungalow to rest.

I was gone a month. When I got back I wouldn't have known her. She'd gained twenty pounds.

"Did you sell it?" she exclaimed after we'd said howdy. "Don't tell me, Jim, you've brought it back. I simply couldn't stand it."

With this I opened up my travelling bag.

"Now, Horty," said I, "Don't be impatient. I have brought it back in one sense. That is, I've had the blamed thing broken up into smaller stones, and this is the result."

With this I pulled out a necklace a mile or so long — I don't know just now how long, but a few hundred feet more or less don't make any difference.

I thought Hortense would just eat me up with joy. Then she looked at me solemn and earnest. There was something troubling Hortense that moment.

"Old man," she said, "What's the difference? Why did I hate that stone when it was the largest in the world, and why don't I feel the same now when it is broken up into bits? One is as useless as the other. Ain't that so?"

With this I sat down and lighted my corncob pipe — which I hadn't tasted in four weeks.

"Well, Horty," I says, "I figure it out in this way. There's no gamble in its being the biggest diamond in the world. But any number of other women may have a necklace like this. The fact is, Horty, that when you are so damned superior to the other people that they can't compete with you, why, what's the use? And I guess that is what was the matter."

A Discovery in Dry Farming.*

BY EDMUND G. KINYON.

S the powder-dry season advanced, Hiram Bevens, homesteader, sat each evening in the door of his shack and gazed out over the fields of waving grain and grass reaching to the limits of his claim. Each day his enthusiasm and conviction grew and deepened — the Bevens system of dry-farming was an obvious, a self-evident, an unqualified success.

"I've raised corn in Missouri and in Oklahoma," he was wont to inform himself — "eighty bushel an acre, some years, — but Bevens will beat his best record this year — sure." Then he would chuckle over the prediction of the cattle men, when he staked his claim, that he would not be able to raise enough to feed a goat.

In the cool of the morning, Mr. Bevens was wont to walk in his promising fields. "Jupiter!" he would exclaim, "the weeds are simply taking this corn, but it's so blamed wet Bevens can't get the cultivator into it. And that alfalfa needs cutting mighty bad too." Then he would sagely cast his weather eye toward the bank of purple haze far on the horizon and note the spirals of dust climbing from the desert floor straight into the heavens. "More storm coming," he would conclude; "blamedist country for storms!" Reaching the edge of his field, he would scrape the mud from his shoes and seek the solitary shade of his little board house.

From time to time, news of Bevens' wonderful discovery in dry-farming filtered into the office of the governor of the desert state. The chief executive, keenly alive to the needs of his people, was deeply interested, and for the fourth time was discussing the matter with the Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture. The latter was inclined to be skeptical.

"Think of what it means to our state," the governor exclaimed. "This man Bevens has been writing to this office every week since

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early spring telling exactly what progress he is making. He claims that by his process he can make the sand storms take the place of rain storms. Sounds queer, I know; but here in his last letter he says his corn is six feet high, and that he is now harvesting his third crop of alfalfa. Think of it! — and the rainfall in Las Varas county only three and seven-tenths inches a year."

"It hasn't rained in Las Varas county in eighteen months," commented the secretary, with a faint show of enthusiasm over the wonderful achievement claimed by Bevens.

"I've written twice," continued the governor, "asking him to outline his system; but naturally he is wary about committing himself in a letter and wants me to come out; says he'll entertain me with watermelons as big as a tub. If there is anything in his system and I should encourage and bring it into general use, it would be a big feather for my administration, Anderson."

"Are you thinking of accepting his invitation, Governor?" asked the secretary.

"I can't leave my office just now, and that's why I sent for you. As the agricultural head of the state, the matter is in your line, and I suggest that you make it a point to visit Las Varas county soon and see what Bevens really has accomplished."

Anderson thought of the heat and dust of the desert in July and made a wry face behind his hand. But his voice was full of assurance: "Certainly, Governor, certainly; I'll arrange to run out there early next week."

At the forlorn station in the foothills, where Knude Anderson, Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture, left the train, he was able to learn but little concerning Bevens. The merchants remembered that an old fellow by that name had been in town a few times, buying scant supplies. He was surly and reticent, however, and had given no information concerning himself. They understood he was holding down a claim somewhere out on the desert. No, they had not heard that he was raising any crops of consequence. A bunch of cowboys knew the location of the Bevens homestead and directed the traveler concerning trails and waterholes. Asked about Bevens' crops, they looked at each other oddly and 'lowed they hadn't been out that way since his corn came up.

The secretary was strongly inclined to turn back to the cool city in the mountains, but, unfortunately, he was under obligations to the governor for his highly desirable position. So, audibly cursing Bevens for his letter-writing proclivities, Anderson hired a wiry bronco from the town corral and in the cool of the morning took the indicated trail to the Bevens homestead.

It was nearly sundown when a solitary horseman guided his weary pony across the sagebrush waste, unmindful of trails, toward a little shack squatting in the midst of the mighty desert. All day, armed with a generous canteen of water, the secretary had struggled with the heat and dust, with diverging trails and dried-up waterholes. Finally, all tracks had dwindled into nothingness, but he had pushed blindly on with a half-fear clutching at his heart — for the desert is cruel and remorseless to those who do not know her ways. As the evening drew on, a solitary habitation came into view across the sea of shimmering heat and to that promised oasis the pony had carried him with its remaining strength.

"Now, this can't be the Bevens place," the traveler speculated as he approached the shanty. "No fields here, nor ever have been. I must have taken the wrong trail back there; but probably I can find out here."

An old man of large bulk, unshaven and dirty, was hobbling out to meet him. He nodded familiarly to the visitor and forstalled all questions by asking one himself.

"Rather expect you're the governor, ain't you, stranger?"

"No, sir; I'm Knude Anderson, representing the governor. Could you direct me to the ranch of Hiram Bevens?"

The old man smiled, maliciously: "I reckon this is the Bevens ranch, Mr. Anderson, and I reckon I'm Bevens — originator and demonstrator of the great Bev —"

Knude Anderson, Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture, dismounted as though vaulted by the explosion of his own wrath. He advanced upon the leering figure and shook his fist threateningly. "Now look here, old man; what do you mean by dragging me out on this infernal desert with a cock and bull story ab —" Anderson exploded no further. From somewhere in his scant attire the old homesteader suddenly produced an ominous

revolver which he held at full cock, the beady points of the 44 bullets showing cunningly in the cylinder holes.

Bevens waved his left hand, indicating the adjacent desert. "I reckon that's pretty good corn," he insinuated.

"Corn!" shouted Anderson — but he carried his protest no further. Something small and cool bored into his left side and a mighty flame of passion leaped up in the blood-shot eyes of the claim-holder. The secretary recoiled and in the instant of recoiling a partial comprehension of his predicament came over him. "It's a splendid piece of corn, Mr. Bevens," he agreed; "let us take a walk and discuss your plan in detail."

As long as the light lasted, Bevens conducted his guest over the well-arranged and productive fields. No Illinois farmer ever exhibited more pride in his possessions. "This barley was sown late," he explained, "and it's a little backward, but it'll come out. Just look at the hay I got off that little patch of alfalfa. And those watermelons! — did you ever see them beat? Just heft one of them."

The Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture gravely stooped and not without effort lifted a huge watermelon. "I guess it at about thirty-two pounds, Bevens," he observed.

At convenient places, Bevens opened gates and conducted his guest into adjoining fields. Once or twice they climbed painfully through a barbed-wire fence, the homesteader always directing the way from the rear, his persuasive revolver in hand.

"My discovery makes this the greatest farming country in the world," he confided to the secretary, "and it's the simplest thing, too — I merely change the sand into water. Whenever a big storm comes up Bevens goes out and smites the wind and makes it rain water 'stead of dust. Studied it all out by myself the first summer I was here; but Bevens wasn't going to tell the governor about it in no letter. Mighty glad he sent you out here."

Anderson eyed the wicked-looking revolver and replied cordially: "Very great pleasure, I'm sure, Mr. Bevens."

"Here's some of it now," continued the wonder-worker. All about were little drifts of sand, eddied there by recent furious winds. Bevens splashed his feet in the pools and laughed, childishly. "Feller doesn't mind wet feet this hot weather."

Then the old man suddenly remembered his duties as a host: "Say, ain't you thirsty after your long ride? Just wait a minute." At the door of the shack he picked up a rusty tin dipper and out of a small water cask scooped a quantity of fine white sand. "Anderson," he said, glowing with pride, "I've got the finest well in the state of —"

"Thank you very much," remonstrated the secretary, "but I believe I'm not thirsty just —"

"Drink it!" screamed Bevens.

With the terrible revolver in his face, Anderson filled his mouth with the sand and spat it out. "It's fine, Bevens, fine; how deep did you have to go?"

At nine o'clock that night in the little red-hot shanty, Bevens, the genial host, was entertaining his distinguished guest at supper. Anderson had hoped desperately that the claim-holder would permit him to start on his return trip at once, but his suggestion that he hasten to the governor with the news of Bevens' wonderful achievements had been met with a snarling refusal.

"But the governor —" the secretary commenced to argue.

Bevens swung his weapon in a gale of anger. "Shut up!" he screamed, "or I'll governor you!" Instantly his mood changed and he continued, tauntingly: "Guess you won't need to go back, friend; we'll fix out the report and mail it in." The idea seemed to please him immensely and he laughed over it; "No, Bevens hardly thinks you'll go back; if you did you'd probably talk too blamed much."

Anderson grew faint as the sinister meaning of the homesteader's words dawned upon him.

"Yes, we'll fix up the report," Bevens continued, after a pause, "but there's no hurry; we'll have supper first."

Such viands as were served at that phantom feast! Corn in the ear; potatoes fresh from the hill and peas from the vine; strawberries with delicious cream; great cubes of red-cored watermelon just off the ice! Bevens enumerated each article and each course with smacking lips, while Anderson, fainting with thirst and fear, echoed and praised. The banquet board was a dirty barrelhead, and on it reposed the ugly revolver, its stock clutched in the nervous twitching fingers of the host.

While the two men ate in pantomime, they discussed the forthcoming report ; but Anderson, realizing the futility of further temporizing, was weighing the avenues and chances of escape. Should he leap for the throat of the cunning maniac? The gun, he knew, would be flung in his face, but there was a fair possibility that the shot would go wild. If it did, what then? The secretary was entirely unarmed, and moreover he was a slight man of little physical strength. The maniac, stooped and shrunken as he was, towered far above him as the two sat at the imaginary supper.

It was just at the moment when Anderson had decided that his best chance lay in a sudden leap and struggle for possession of the revolver, that an unexpected thing happened. The terrified man knew the desert well enough to realize that in the ordinary course no human being was within a score of miles of the homestead; yet even as he looked longingly through the door, which he sat facing, a tall, lank form appeared and reached swiftly for the shoulders of the old claim-holder. There was a spasm of feet in the air, an overturned barrel and a crashing explosion. More forms struggled into the little room — then Anderson's legs suddenly gave way and he sank into unconsciousness.

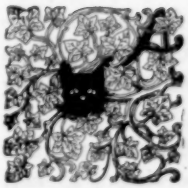
The secretary's first sensation as he struggled back to a remembrance of the events of the day was of real water sinking into the corroding thirst of his throat. Overhead shone the stars and the cool night air fanned his fevered cheek. Around him squatted a little group of men and a canteen was being supported at his lips by a friendly hand. Somewhere off in the distance he could hear the screams and curses of his recent host.

Later the boss cowboy, now rather bored by the whole proceedings, explained the situation in the terse language characteristic of plainsmen:

"Spell after you left town, XIX outfit comes in and says how the old man's waterhole's dried up and he were acting some locoed. Course, we always knowed he weren't just right 'upstairs' like, so we 'lowed we'd better saunter 'long out this way. Reckon's kind a-lucky we did, partner."

Ariana's Test Case.*

BY KATE D. SWEETSER.



ARIANA KENT'S cradle had been rocked by Methodist hands which later led her on through by-ways of ecstacy, and hedges of biblical wisdom and grace, until such times as maternal relatives wheeled her gently about, and planted her orphaned feet upon the solid rock of the true and only Church. Upon Methodist fervor and Episcopal form she herself at twenty-one turned her back, facing towards the sterner Presbyterianism of a saintly grandmother whose character and religion embodied her highest ideals.

With a background of such varied religious experience, Ariana's mental vision held much of mystic imagery, and a child's impression of things unseen, sharply outlined in imagination from earliest days.

The one great good she gained from her composite Methodist-Episcopal-Presbyterian creed was a positive, unfaltering belief in the efficacy of prayer, and an unbounded trust in the personal interest of a Supreme Being whose joy was ever augmented by attention to her petitions, as He leaned from a heavenly bulwark of gold and precious stones to dispense spiritual blessings or temporal benefits. And, failing to find within His heavenly warehouse such graces or goods as would fit her need, Ariana believed with the faith born of tuition and instinct, that its substitute would be equally satisfying. Heart and head, soul and body, she believed in a Hearer and Answerer of prayer.

Of Ariana's inner life and experience, this much. Of her outer self, more.

She was clear-cut, both in character and in features, and attractive through a certain reserve of words and manner indicative of unfathomed mysteries, beyond the bars. Among girls she

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counted many friends, while among men there were Courtland Beekman, Robert Myles and a score of lesser lights, always ready to do her bidding. They liked the girl's frank comradeship, and were not afraid that she would hurry them on to a critical point by her desire for courtship.

Her Methodism did not preclude dancing, nor her Presbyterianism forbid those frivolities indulged in by her friends and cousins, so she went through all the different phases of society days and ways before discovering that her inclinations were pulling her in another direction.

Since early childhood, she had lived with the uncle who was her guardian, and his twin daughters had been like sisters to her. But the twins were taking society seriously, as a life work, its end and aim marriage. Light of heart and gay of manner, they were as incapable of deep feeling or thought as sportive kittens, while Ariana liked to react from a ball with charity kindergartening; to clear the cobwebs of bridge from her brain with an essay on evolution, and preferred a brisk walk with a comrade to a matinee. So she and the twins had little in common except one desire. Ariana, too, longed fervently for marriage, and for this reason, — Living with even as dear an aunt and uncle as hers were was not entirely to her liking, now that she had begun to have interests alien to the strictly conventional ones of family tradition, and, being possessed of her own little fortune, she wanted to have an apartment where she might live her own life in her own way. But her uncle, conservative where women were concerned, objected so strongly to the idea, that from affection for him, she promised never to quit his home so long as she remained single. Then it was that marriage as a release began to appeal to her.

At twenty-three, Ariana was in love. Unreservedly, riotously in love, with no thought of indelicacy in the knowledge that her feeling was apparently not returned.

Courtland Beekman had sought her out when she was just entering society, and had become her intimate friend, seeing her as often as his leisure hours would allow, and talking to her of his personal affairs as freely as if she had been a man. So far, in his society career, young Beekman had been always admired

for his extreme dignity, his charming manners and his hardness of heart, which fascinated, while it disconcerted, scheming maidens. He had never before shown marked attention to any girl, but Ariana interested him, while his artistic nature and broad point of view appealed so deeply to her that a close comradeship sprang up between them. The world called him the man without a heart, but inferred that Ariana had differing evidence, while Ariana did not reveal the fact that she had never yet surprised a single spark of sentiment from him. Meanwhile, the world conjectured and the family whispered, and Ariana's love throve on indifference. Courtland Beekman seemed unconscious of the meaning attached to his devotion, but Ariana was not so. She grew white over his absence, rosy red at his coming, and tremulously hopeful that some day she would find in him the signs that proclaim a lover. As yet his big hand never trembled when it held her small one for a moment, his eyes never followed her around the room as she flitted here and there, nor was his anguish keen at parting, Ariana knew by the agony of contrast.

He *should* care as she did! He must! He *must*! But even the emphasis of her decision failed to change his manner towards her. Then it was, she took refuge in the article of her creed which had proved itself of much avail from childhood's days.

Let him love me; let him love me *now*! was her constant prayer, its imperative pleading tempered by the peace of a belief that she was heard, and would be answered, which fell over her like a mantle. And still Courtland Beekman came and went and came again, as usual, and Ariana's life offered no new situation to be met.

On Washington's Birthday, the twins were out of town. Ariana reigned supreme at home, and Courtland Beekman had covenanted for a cup of tea at five o'clock. It was sweetest pleasure to anticipate his coming while she fluttered about the library, arranging tea things, lowering lights and placing chairs and cushions. Soon the light flickering over walls and woodwork was like the glow of love itself, and Ariana was athrob with expectation.

When she heard him enter, she moved swiftly towards the door with extended hands ; a reflected radiance shining on her upturned face, enthusiasm in her graceful alert poise. But it was not Court-

land Beekman, it was Robert Myles who took the nerveless hand and looked into the suddenly blanching face, while Ariana tried to return his salute with one suited to an eager welcome. It was a poor imitation, but Robert Myles was only thinking of life from his own view-point that afternoon, and he laid her flutter of hesitation to the same cause that was unnerving him.

Presently, with a woman's ready tact, she led him on to tell her of his doings, while she made the tea and gradually regained her composure. Seated beside her, he watched her in an enchanted spell of pleasure as the filmy lace fell away from her arm while she worked with deft exquisiteness. A surge of feeling swept him out of himself, and he did not resist the impulse.

"You make a poem of tea-brewing, — and everything else," he faltered. "Will you—some day—make it for me, in *our* home?"

Leaning back, white and still, against her chair, she closed her eyes that she might not see, — that she might only hear the words. They were what she had petitioned to hear, but from other lips. "Let him love me; let him love me *now*!" Had a Supreme Being made this mistake in personalities? or was this lover a better substitute held in reserve for her when the other proved impossible? Had the mistake of choice been her own? She dared not refuse this until she was sure this was not the answer to her cry. She must think. She must stop wondering. She must wait.

His deferent patience with her silence touched her. Robert Myles was not a man to treat lightly. He was worthy of deepest respect and love. Ariana had a great affection for him, which rose in her heart and eyes as she laid a hand on his. "Will you wait?" she murmured. "I must be sure."

He would have swept her into his arms, but she was firm. "Not yet," she said. "I am only feeling now. Let me have a chance to think. It may not be you, but oh — forgive me — some one else. I am not sure of anything."

It was a strained position for a man to accept. Most of them would have repudiated it, but Robert Myles was too old and wise for that. Swiftly, he carried her hand to his lips. "I can trust you, dear," he said. "I will wait. You can be no more than honest."

Then she heard the door close behind him, and knew that a true

nobleman had left his precious gift within the dimly lighted room.

From that moment, by day she walked and worked and thought, and by night she wrestled with the problem, but no light came. Irresolute, undecided, she worried and pondered and weighed evidence for and against herself, with no satisfying result.

She had received a little note from Courtland Beekman, giving his trivial reason for having disappointed her on that afternoon of Washington's Birthday. It was an insufficient excuse, but the sight of his hand-writing had given her more delight than all the expressed devotion of her other lover. And yet, what did that matter? Robert Myles would be an ideal husband; he loved her, he wanted a home as much as she did. To Courtland Beekman, the freedom of bachelor life appealed most of all. He did not care for her or he would have spoken. Robert Myles was surely a heaven-sent gift. Having firmly decided this, inclination tempted her to wonder whether she might not be taking too much for granted. Perhaps after all, Robert Myles's proposal at this, a critical time, was merely a happening.

After a week of indecision, it came to her; the mistake she had made. Faith without works is vain, and has been since the world began. She would trust, but work as well. If this failed, all signs pointed to Robert Myles as a heaven-sent substitute.

Her note to Courtland Beekman went in the early mail. It merely said:

"My Dear Mr. Beekman:

"There has come into my life something of which I want to tell you myself. Perhaps, I am foolish, but I could not bear to keep it from you. Will you drop in at five to-morrow?

"Faithfully, as ever,

Ariana Kent."

At the time mentioned he was with her and looking with wonder at the nun-like gown she wore. Ariana was not thinking of clothes this time. She did not hide her gravity nor let smiles chase away the trouble written on her face. They sat together, and neither of them spoke, or knew that they were silent, for many moments. Finally he framed his thoughts. "Well," he said, with a nervous directness, "is it what I think?"

She looked unwaveringly into his gray eyes. "You are my

best friend," she said. "I shall speak freely to you. I deeply admire and respect a man. He has asked me to make a home for him."

"And you have said —" the words were fierce with conviction of what was to come, and Ariana trembled as she interrupted him, "I have said —" she began again, but he rose and thrust out his hand to ward off the blow. "Never mind," he said. "That belongs to the other fellow. I know what you mean."

It was not proper to leave her when he could see she was suffering, but it seemed to him the only thing to do. Then with a swift movement he stood by her again and gripped her hands firmly.

"I supposed you knew," he said.

"Knew what?"

"*What?*" his eyes expressed the flower of perfect love that moment come to full bloom. "*What?* Great God, you must know *what*! What else *could* it be?"

"But you never said so. How could I know?"

There was no sight of the girl's eyes now and her face was curtained with confusion as she spoke.

He was bewildered and hopeless in his bewilderment.

"Said so, Ariana? I never knew I needed to. I thought women always understood. And you say, I've lost you — lost you — just because —"

But she checked his utterance, though her eyes could not yet meet his.

"Women always have to be told things, always!" she rippled, "but, Courtland, listen, I have sent no answer — yet!"

In the ecstacy of silence which followed, Ariana, by her test case, proved that faith without works is vain, that with works it can accomplish miracles, even in an age of doubt.

The Cult of the Grotesque.*

BY FLORENCE SEYLER THOMPSON.

IT was precisely eight o'clock on a May evening that Mr. Richard Lyons, who had been alternately reading and dozing in his famous library — with the ten thousand volumes — arose, stretched his arms above his head, slipped on a light overcoat — there was a tang in the air for all of the spring-time — put on his hat, turned off the lights, and stepped out on the porch. Then he turned on the porch-light, locked the front door, and descended the several steps to the avenue.

On the stroke of eight, exactly twelve months later, Mr. Lyons ascended the several steps, turned *off* the porch-light, unlocked his door, turned on the light and sat himself down in his famous library.

Let me say right here that I am a neighbor and a lifelong friend of Mr. Lyons. I was away on this particular evening. In fact, I was abroad, whither I'd gone to see a wonderful, historical pageant that was soon to take place. Otherwise I should not have had to wait for nearly a decade to solve the mystery of why Mr. Lyons had left his porch-light burning for three hundred and sixty-five nights and days.

Upon my return home I heard the story of the disappearance of the well-known scholar, and as his closest friend I at once began an investigation.

Mrs. Henderson, his housekeeper, could not be shaken in her belief that Mr. Lyons would come back some day. She could give no reason for her faith; she simply believed so. On the day in question she had served his dinner at six o'clock as usual. The day had passed as had a hundred others. Mr. Lyons had not mentioned going out, much less going away. She herself was to be out that evening at the wedding of a friend. Upon her return in

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the morning it was to find the master of the house gone and the light burning on the porch.

This was very strange, as Mr. Lyons was not an eccentric man in any respect. He had no enemies; no relatives even who might profit by his untimely taking off.

The excitement finally subsided. I was forced to agree with Mrs. Henderson that Mr. Lyons would in all probability return. In the matter of the porch-light the housekeeper was superstitious to the last degree. She would not consent to have it turned off. The master had turned it on; if he were in the land of the living he would appear in due time and turn it off.

And he did! But upon his return he refused absolutely to say where he'd been; he refused to tell even me, his life-long neighbor and friend. This did not offend me in the least. I am, as the public knows, a student of the odd. I may even say that I am the originator of that cult of which so many are the ardent followers to-day — the Cult of the Grotesque. I have an independent fortune, so can ride at my pleasure any little hobbies of this nature.

Now I was morally certain that some fantastic episode had filled in that mysterious interval of a year in my friend's life. I have learned to distrust the commonplace. In fact it was this too ready acceptance of the commonplace *as* commonplace that led to my becoming a delver in the grotesque.

I used to pass daily and visit often a certain delicatessen store kept by a fat, prosperous German, and his fat, prosperous wife. The store was immaculately clean, the cheeses and herring odorous but delicious. I would have sworn that in that rotund, prosperous, unromantic old German couple the very essence of contentment was exemplified. Can you imagine then how odd, how grotesque a thing it was to find that one lovely June morning when the birds were carolling their sweetest madrigals, they had both cut their throats and were reposing most inartistically among their little kegs of Bismark herring?

Then and there I became a student of the odd. My researches in this, my maiden effort, revealed behind that gruesome yet seemingly very commonplace suicide, one of the most extraordinary romances that mind can conceive. Some of the features of it were a tall clock with a cryptic inscription on its huge disc, a suicide

pact with a soldier of the Swiss army, faithfully fulfilled at the moment the clock struck the fatal hour, though many years and miles might have seemed to nullify that oath of the past. And you may have heard of "The Adventure of the Cross and Crescent," which I have given to the public. But I am digressing. To return to Mr. Lyons.

Now, I knew perfectly well that Richard Lyons would never abandon a ten-thousand-volume library without some tremendous reason. That he left his porch-light burning (for at that time he had no money to throw away) proved conclusively to me and to his housekeeper that he meant to come back that evening.

What happened after he left his home, of such vital importance that it kept him away from his home for a whole year? When did it happen? How far had he gone?

How did it happen? Where did he go? If I could but find a logical answer to these questions I was certain that I might add some valuable data to my notes on the grotesque.

I will not weary you with the details of my researches. They were not entirely barren of results, yet to be frank I failed to solve the mystery. I was unable to mosaic the bits I had gleaned into a perfect pattern.

I went to Richard Lyons. I laid before him the meagre facts I had learned and asked him to supply the missing details. Now Richard is more or less in sympathy with this Cult of the Grotesque. He was openly contemptuous of it before this sinister episode in his life; but after that he was tolerant and sympathetic. Yet he refused, although with a reservation that softened it. At the end of ten years, he said, he could feel justified in telling me. I am a patient man. The real seeker after knowledge always is. At the end of the ten years I heard from his own lips the story of that evening's experience and its subsequent developments. I will therefore tell the story not in his words but my own.

I will begin at the moment when Richard awakened from his doze in his library. He wanted to smoke and remembered suddenly that he had no more cigars. A drug store was just four blocks down. The night had a tang in the air, so he put on his coat. He took his hat, turned off the lights — the housekeeper having gone out — stepped outside and turned on the porch-

light. He expected to be back within ten or fifteen minutes.

Richard had gone just half of the distance to the drug store — two blocks — when he noticed a cab drawn up to the curbing. He glanced idly from the cab to the house in front of which it stood. Some one, the driver evidently, was running down the steps with a white card in his hand. At the same moment a man put his head out of the carriage window.

"We've got the wrong number; this house is 519. My mistake; 719 is two blocks farther up." The cabby was apologetic.

The man in the carriage uttered an impatient exclamation; the driver swung himself to his seat, but Richard hastily interposed: "I beg your pardon," he said, addressing the man in the cab. "Your driver is looking for 719. That's my house. I am Richard Lyons — did you wish to ——"

But at his very first words the stranger had grown visibly excited; he had instantly vacated the cab and come up close to Richard. The light shone full on the latter's face.

"Yes, yes! You are he! Extraordinary!" He seemed delighted and nervous both. Meanwhile the street lamp had revealed to Richard a tall, exceedingly distinguished-looking man. Just what there was about him so impressive he could not exactly define. He wondered if the long, rich, black top coat conveyed that subtle impression of an authoritative personality. The braided frogs stretching across the broad breast of the stranger gave to the coat and its wearer a look of opulence.

The stranger had drawn Richard aside. He took out of his pocket a paper whose effect was sufficiently staggering to cause Richard to enter the carriage without further parley, whereupon in mad haste, they were driven to a railroad station. Some forty minutes later the Twentieth Century Flyer was tearing out of Chicago for New York. In the private drawing-room sat the opulent stranger and Richard Lyons.

In telling me the story Richard said that when the stranger had first presented his credentials (which was the paper that had so staggered him) he had for one lightning instant believed the stranger to be a lunatic; the second moment, wildly inconceivable as it seemed, he was convinced of the integrity and sincerity of his errand.

Richard had had time only to propose that they drive to his home and there discuss the matter in which his distinguished visitor had come so far; but so pressing was the time, so tremendously important the mission, with so much secrecy was it necessary to hedge this pilgrimage about, that it would mean everything if Mr. Lyons would come without further question.

So, in the quiet compartment of the Flyer, Mr. Lyons learned the stranger's secret mission and, with what feelings can be imagined, heard that upon him — Richard Lyons, a quiet, tax-paying citizen of Cook County — depended the stability of a supposedly mighty kingdom.

But at this point Richard showed a proper American spirit. He'd do everything in his power to help out a tottering dynasty, but on one condition only. The man with the frogs on his coat awaited his ultimatum nervously. That condition was that he be told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. If a decent Cook County citizen was wanted as a stop-gap for a bomb Richard thought he ought to know it. The stranger hastily reassured him, but the situation as laid before him was hardly less appalling.

Mr. Lyons was of course aware that a wonderful historic pageant was soon to take place abroad. Richard was. What Mr. Lyons was perhaps not aware of was that that particular country was just at this time in a critical state of political upheaval ; it could not be made too emphatic how critical that state was. Upon this great pageant more than appeared upon the surface, depended. Not only would it serve to commemorate a great era of achievement and a mighty reign, but it would in all probability — no, it was certain in fact — to stave off indefinitely the crisis that was now impending. Every detail of the program had been arranged for months. At this very hour, people were gathering from all parts of the world for the glorious pageant. But a terrible obstacle had arisen.

As Mr. Lyons must know (he didn't, however) the success of that brilliant pageant depended upon the presence of his most exalted majesty. No matter how glittering and gorgeous the rest of the procession (which would take five hours to pass a given point) unless his majesty rode alone in state, plainly visible to his

adoring subjects, the whole big show would be a flat fiasco.

But the exalted personage would of course be there, Richard interposed. And it was then that the stranger had grown visibly embarrassed. There was an obstacle it seemed; a delightful obstacle to look upon, but no more to be moved than the Rock of Gibraltar. Yes, certainly, — it was a lady. This lady, who dwelt in a charmingly sequestered, vine-hung villa some hundred miles away from the official residence of the exalted personage, had for some time been nursing a grievance.

She had stirred things up considerably and had hinted at even more picturesque possibilities. Just at this particular time when the dynasty was not so steady on its foundations as it might be, it simply wouldn't do to have the lady tell things. For the thousandth time the exalted personage had vowed eternal devotion. The lady was going to make him prove that devotion. The exalted personage would have to choose between her and the pageant. On the morning of the great day he must be with her, a hundred miles away. She would not compromise. Unless he obeyed she would tell all. Maybe she would anyway. She was perfectly and diabolically aware that certain resources upon which the exalted personage was depending and that would be available immediately after the pageant would be instantly withdrawn if the lady did indeed tell all. At the same time if his majesty failed to ride in that processional in all the pomp and circumstance of his most gorgeous apparellings, no one could foretell how awful might be the consequences. The dynasty seemed threatened from the four points of the compass at once.

As yet Richard had failed to see how he was to act the role of Atlas and support this wobbly dynasty on his shoulders; but this, too, was presently made clear. While things were at this desperate crisis and the exalted personage was almost ill over it, a clipping from an American magazine had unexpectedly suggested an escape from the royal dilemma. This clipping was merely an article describing the fine private libraries in Chicago, and mentioned the ten thousand volumes of Mr. Richard Lyons. The writer, in concluding his article, had added quite incidentally the interesting fact of Mr. Lyons' extraordinary resemblance to a certain royal personage abroad.

"Mr. Lyons," read the article, "might be the twin of His Majesty, so marked is the likeness."

The opulent stranger explained to Richard that theirs was a desperate expedient snatched at by desperate men. Forthwith, he had come as His Majesty's special envoy on this exceedingly delicate mission.

Pressed for time as he was, he had met with annoying delays and vexations, and his incognito had to be preserved at any cost. He had not even been sure that the resemblance was sufficient to serve their purpose — not sure that Richard could be found or would come. No cable would serve. It had to be a personal pilgrimage. But he himself was satisfied. The likeness was indeed startling. His Majesty might now go in reasonable safety to the villa of the lady and so prove to her that her power over him was absolute. It was quite probable that in turn the lady would then show herself possessed of magnanimity and would cause no more trouble in the future. Meanwhile, Richard Lyons of Cook County, United States, would ride in the royal coach and receive the homage of His Majesty's adorning subjects.

Richard, when he told me the story, said that he went into the palace on the stranger's arm, coated and hatted and disguised as much as possible, unchallenged, through a private entrance. He said His Majesty was mightily relieved to see him and they sat down sociably and smoked and talked things over, dwelling especially on the contrariness of women.

His Majesty was really a pretty good sort of fellow Richard said. He admitted he'd kind of made a mess of things and he couldn't endure to have all the other kings laughing at him and driving him mad with picture post-cards, if this thing got out.

Three hours after Richard had entered the palace he was asleep in the royal bed, and His Majesty, disguised in Mr. Lyons' light overcoat and Stetson hat, walked out of the palace on the opulent stranger's arm. Then, for the first time in his life, His Majesty got on an ordinary train and rode a hundred miles to a little villa in the woodland. He was absolutely safe from recognition. The whole world knew that this was the morning of the gorgeous pageant and was not His Majesty to ride in the procession, the most glittering figure of all?